THOUGHTS

ON

CARD-PLAYING.

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THE practice of card-playing is at preſent ſo prevalent amongſt all ranks, claſſes and characters, that to hope to alter the public taſte reſpecting it, would manifeſt no ſmall degree of ignorance and preſumption. But

it is wonderful that it ſhould be neceſſary to uſe any arguments to convince ſober well-diſpoſed perſons, that their time might be ſpent to much more advantage than it now ſo often is at the card-table.

To cenſure gaming as a low, unmanly, deſtructive vice, is not the deſign of this little eſſay. It is not likely that amongſt profeſſed gameſters it will be honored with the ſlighteſt peruſal; and thoſe few into whoſe hands it is moſt likely to fall, will condemn, as freely as the author, what has brought multitudes to poverty, deſpair, and death. Neither is it intended to remonſtrate with thoſe, who are avowedly the friends of diſſipation, and attend

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to the buſineſs of the card-table, as one amongſt many expedients to kill time, and baniſh reflection.

The perſons for whom theſe thoughts are intended, are ſenſible of the value of time, and devote a conſiderable part of it to the acquiſitions of knowledge, the pleaſures of ingenuity, and the nobler purſuits of virtue and religion. Yet whatever be their other avocations, the card-table ſeldom fails to occupy the principal part of their evening.

The uſual arguments which have been brought againſt card-playing, have failed, becauſe they have gone on a miſtaken ground. It has been repreſented as actually *ſinful*; this we pre-

tend not to aſſert; it is in itſelf an harmleſs amuſement; and, were it only introduced in a promiſcuous company, where inſtructive and pleaſing converſation cannot be conveniently maintained, we would ſay nothing againſt it. It muſt alſo be granted, that ſome of the arguments levelled againſt card-playing, if they are allowed valid, prove more than their abettors intend; for if card-playing is wrong *becauſe* it is abuſed, the argument is equally forcible againſt every avocation or enjoyment of life.

Neither can it be denied, that many of the objections to cards are trifling. That they were formerly in general diſuſe amongſt good people, is admitted; but

but ſo were many other things, which are now eſteemed not only harmleſs, but beneficial. It has often been ſaid, that the paſſions are unduly excited by card-playing; that ſucceſs is followed by arrogance, and the want of it by peeviſhneſs; but this can only apply to thoſe in whom theſe effects *are* produced, and cannot touch thoſe who play in good-humour, merely for amuſement. Cards, it has frequently been urged, are dangerous, becauſe they are ſo often uſed as implements of gaming; but *they* can never be influenced by this who ſtake but little, and play ſolely for the pleaſure of the game. Card-playing has been objected to by men of piety, as criminal, becauſe it partakes of the nature of a lot, and ſo

is a virtual appeal to the Almighty, reſpecting a matter in itſelf very inſignificant. On this principle every game of chance has been conſidered by ſome, as a breach of the third commandment. It is ſcarcely neceſſary to ſay, that this argument would bear an equal application to all thoſe actions in life which depend on contingencies, over which we have no influence. And beſides, who ever ſat down at the card-table, with the idea of making ſuch an appeal?

Senſible and good people, feeling the weakneſs of theſe objections, have too ſoon concluded that *nothing* can be ſaid againſt it worthy of conſideration; and, by their attachment to it on other principles,

principles, have proved, that a bad argument ſtrengthens the cauſe it was intended to deſtroy.

Now if *ſuch* perſons would allow themſelves a little time to think over the following conſiderations, they would perhaps ſee, that card-playing, to the length they carry it, if not in itſelf ſinful, is both trifling and dangerous.

The time uſually devoted to card-playing, is certainly *much greater* than a mere amuſement ſhould be ſuffered to occupy. There are families who make profeſſion of religion, and whoſe mornings are ſpent in buſineſs, literature, and ingenious accompliſhments, whoſe afternoons are, with unceaſing uniformity,

uniformity, devoted to cards. To no ſingle object do they dedicate ſo much time. Were they to employ three hours every day, for a long courſe of years, in the peruſal of *one* book, and when it is finiſhed, to go over and over it again and again, in the ſame exact round, it would be thought tedious and unpleaſant, whatever entertainment and inſtruction the volume were capable of yielding. Yet, on a moderate computation, eighteen hours every week, amounting in the courſe of a year to conſiderably more than one whole month, are ſpent, in the prime and vigor of life, in this ſingle diverſion of cards, by people of enlarged minds, extenſive knowledge, lively imaginations, and, what is more, virtuous and pious principles!

Life

Life is really too ſhort, and time too valuable, to have ſo large a proportion of both thus waſted. It deſerves conſideration alſo, that the buſineſs of the card-table, as it is uſually managed, precludes the pleaſure and advantage of free converſation. This amuſement (if ſuch it may be called) is the chief occupation of a ſocial afternoon, even amongſt good ſort of people. Allowing, that in the abſence of company, there are, in the courſe of the year, ſome few evenings of ſeceſſion, ſtill, whenever an opportunity offers for free converſation, by an addition to the family party, it is as conſtantly prevented by the introduction of cards. From ſuch an intercourſe, what benefit can ariſe, or what ſource of rational reflection is laid open to view?

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The prevailing practice of card-playing naturally aſſociates thoſe, who, except in this one reſpect, are diſſimilar; and ſeparates thoſe, who, with this ſingle exception, are alike. For this mode of ſpending time, the wiſe and the ignorant, the aged and the young, the ſober and the diſſipated, poſſeſs equal qualifications; and to form ſuch ſocieties, the queſtion will be, not, Who is the moſt inſtructive and amuſing companion? but, Who is the card-player? If, on the contrary, there are two well-diſpoſed families, one plays at cards, and the other does not, but who, in other reſpects, have ſimilar views, taſtes and characters, their intercourſe muſt be very imperfect, ſince however ready the card-playing family may be, occaſionally

occaſionally to ſacrifice an afternoon to converſation with their more ſcrupulous friends, the idea of this will produce, in the obliged party, a reluctance to make frequent inroads on a ſettled cuſtom, and will, of courſe, prevent that intimacy which would otherwiſe be agreeable and advantageous to both. And it is well known, that in a divided company, ſome playing, and others ſitting by, all intereſting converſation is as much precluded as if the whole party were to join in the amuſement. I cannot omit another incidental evil which almoſt univerſally attends card-playing, and which, to well-diſpoſed and ſerious minds, will appear particularly alarming. I allude to the encroachments it makes on that

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part of the evening, which reaſon and religion teach us ſhould be ſpent in a more retired and profitable manner. Late hours tend to the injury, if not the total deſtruction, of thoſe exerciſes of domeſtic and private devotion, from which true piety derives ſome of its trueſt enjoyment. And though it is readily acknowledged, that there are ſeaſons and occaſions in which the time uſually allotted to theſe exerciſes may be, with propriety, otherwiſe ſpent, yet whatever tends to break the habit of regarding them with conſtancy, muſt in its nature be dangerous; and that this is the caſe with card-parties, muſt be allowed even by their warmeſt friends. Few people who enter into the ſpirit of the game, are ſo much on their guard

as

as to be willing, at a preciſe time, to lay it aſide. One excuſe for want of regularity leads to another, till at length the evening is ſo far gone, and the attention ſo engaged by the ſcenes with which it has been engaged, that neither time or inclination remain for thoſe ſerious duties which impiety may treat as enthuſiaſtic, but which conſcience muſt approve as highly rational, improving, and ſatisfactory. It is alſo worthy the conſideration of ſober and religious people, who ſpend their afternoons at cards, the improper influence it is likely to have on the minds of the younger branches of their families and acquaintance.

When young people join in ſuch parties, they not only loſe much of that

time which might be ſpent at leaſt in recreations more ſerviceable both to their health and the improvement of their minds, but they are gradually formed into ſuch a habit of play, that they learn to conſider it as one ſtanding part of their daily employment. A habit thus ſettled in early life is not eaſily eradicated. If reflections of this nature ſhould lead prudent parents to forbid cards to their children, or to adviſe a very moderate uſe of them as they grow up in life, it merits enquiry how far they will think themſelves bound to comply with theſe injunctions, while they ſee thoſe who are more advanced in years and wiſdom attend to them as a part of their daily amuſement. Young people ſo ſituated, will long for the happy day that ſhall break

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down the boundary, and admit them at once to thoſe enjoyments in which their parents and friends ſo largely participate.

To this it ſhould be added, that no practice, which in itſelf conſidered, is without the boundaries of vice, is ſo likely to injure the minds and morals of ſervants as that of card-playing. The character of moſt people, eſpecially of thoſe who poſſeſs not opportunities for very impartial enquiry, is to a greater or leſs degree formed by imitation. In an orderly and harmonious family, where ſervants are accuſtomed to think with reſpect and eſteem of thoſe who preſide, it is ſcarcely poſſible that they ſhould not imbibe their taſtes

and habits. Here the evil of card-playing appears in a very ſtrong light. When it is ſanctified by *ſuch* heads of families, it will appear to ſervants perfectly innocent, if not highly beneficial. But not diſcerning between one motive and another, they will quickly be brought not only to devote all their hours of leiſure to this faſcinating amuſement, but actually to enter into the ſpirit of gaming. For it is obvious, that however indifferent perſons in eaſy and affluent circumſtances may be as to ſucceſs, a very ſmall ſum muſt be of importance in the view of a ſervant. The loſs which in the drawing-room is trifling, becomes ſerious in the ſervants' hall; and the gain, which is ſoon forgotten in the former, is the occaſion in the

the latter of real joy. It gives them alſo the habit of keeping diſorderly and vicious company; for in *their* walks of life, gaming is almoſt invariably connected with every other vice which degrades the moral dignity, and enervates the ſtrength of the mind. By theſe means their characters will become vile, their duty to their maſters be neglected, and the ſecurity of the houſe, which ſhelters them, endangered. All this evil ariſes from their imitation of the conduct of their ſuperiors; and it will be in vain to attempt to cruſh the practice of card-playing in the lower orders of people, while it is in general repute amongſt thoſe whom they reverence and reſpect.

If, then, the right improvement of time be an object of any importance with a virtuous mind; if much of the comfort and uſefulneſs of life depends on the connections we form; if it be a point worthy of great attention to maintain private and domeſtic regularity; if it be of moment that the young be preſerved from diſſipation; if wiſdom and duty require us to guard againſt every ſpecies of conduct, which, in its conſequences, may corrupt the morals of the inferior members of ſociety, then the prevailing practice of card-playing amongſt the ſober and religious part of the community, ſtands ſelf-condemned. But if card-playing be omitted, how is a miſcellaneous company to be entertained? If we give up this old experienced

rienced friend of the ſocial hour, what ſhall we ſubſtitute in its room? The great difficulty with thoughtful well-diſpoſed people would be ſoon removed, were they principally to aſſociate with thoſe who are able, with credit and advantage, to maintain an agreeable and improving afternoon's converſation. And, indeed, amongſt cultivated minds of ſimilar ſentiments and habits, one ſhould ſuppoſe it no difficult taſk ſo to manage a converſation as to make it both pleaſant and inſtructive. As it is by no means eſſential to happineſs, that *every* evening ſhould be ſpent in company, thoſe which are occupied at home, or amongſt intimate friends who frequentlly meet, an amuſing and inſtructing book were to be occaſionally

introduced, it would not only relieve the company of the difficulty of ſupporting long converſation, but would naturally lead the way to ſome ſubject on which they might exchange their thoughts to advantage. After all, it is by no means the intention of this little eſſay to exclude card-playing as on *every* occaſion a great evil.

And if connections in buſineſs, or a ſocial diſpoſition, ſhould occaſionally form ſuch combinations of company as cannot be well ſupported without the aid of the card-table, rather than ſuffer converſation to be loſt in ceremonious ſilence, or to degenerate into ſcandal, let the card-table, as a weapon of defence, be introduced. From theſe hints

it appears, that the evil of private card-playing ariſes chiefly from the undue importance which is aſcribed to it: that kept within bounds, it is as innocent as a game at draughts, or a game at bowls, but beyond theſe limits, it is trifling, pernicious, and ſinful.

Should theſe lines, in a ſingle inſtance, be the means of degrading card-playing, from a daily employment to an occaſional and inferior gratification, by turning off the attention from trifles, and fixing it on realities; they will have accompliſhed the wiſhes, and exceeded the expectation of

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